



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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For Immediate Release  
June 19, 2003

Contact: Stacey Farnen  
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**HOYER ON LHHS FY04 BILL:**

*“Republican Tax Cut Chickens Come Home to Roost”*

**WASHINGTON – House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD), a senior member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, released the following statement today at the subcommittee markup of the fiscal year 2004 funding bill:**

“The Republican tax cut chickens have come home to roost today. The trillions of dollars in tax cuts that President Bush and Congressional Republicans have proudly rammed through Congress are forcing freezes and outright cuts in funding for the education, health and labor programs that have made this country the envy of the world for a century.

“President Bush set the bar quite low for Republicans when he submitted a budget that was 5.1 percent *below* last year’s funding levels, cut elementary and secondary education by over \$900 million, slashed after-school centers by \$400 million, and eliminated 46 different education programs.

“So, while the Chairman's mark tries to save some credibility for the Republican Party on education by mitigating some of the outrageous education cuts and eliminations in the President's budget, they are still breaking their promise to leave no child behind.

“At a time when our states and local governments are cutting education to the point of ‘teachers of the year’ losing positions, at a time when schools and teachers are struggling to meet the new standards set in No Child Left Behind, it is a display of out-of-whack priorities and values to be shortchanging our education system while passing tax cuts that put a greater share of the tax burden on the middle class and have questionable benefits for the economy.

“Finally, the height of irony is the cuts in employment and training funding by 1 percent from last year’s level and a 2 percent reduction in the President's request for Job Corps, which serves 700,000 disadvantaged young people gain vocation and academic training during a period of high unemployment and economic insecurity.

“Once again, the Republican Party’s policy lays bare their political priorities and values: tax cuts that help the few and won’t benefit the economy over education, health and labor programs that help make our nation the greatest in the world.”

# FY2004 EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS: GOP BROKEN PROMISES

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*The Republican leadership has provided an allocation for FY2004 education spending that forces them to break specific promises they made about education funding just months ago. This bill clearly proves that the Republican Party has determined that tax cuts for wealthy Americans should be the nation's first priority - not education, as they promised:*

**BROKEN PROMISE - Overall Education Funding:** In April, the Majority loudly proclaimed in the conference report on the FY 2004 budget resolution that they would provide a "\$3-billion increase from the previous year for the Department of Education." This bill falls far short of that promise, providing only a \$2.3 billion or 4.3 percent increase for education - the smallest dollar increase in five years and the smallest percentage increase in eight years. A promise made, and a promise broken.

**BROKEN PROMISE - No Child Left Behind:** On January 8, 2002, President Bush, promised that "America's schools will be on a new path of reform, and a new path of results...And our schools will have greater resources to meet those goals." Now, we have reform. Now, we have accountability plans from all 50 states. Where are the resources? This bill provides an increase of only \$381 million or 1.6 percent over the current funding level for the No Child Left Behind Act. That is a freeze in real terms. We can provide a trillion dollars in tax cuts, but at the same time, this bill doesn't come even close to meeting the funding levels authorized in No Child Left Behind Act - which would require another \$8 billion in FY 2004.

**BROKEN PROMISE - Special Education:** In the budget resolution conference report, the Republicans stated that it would increase IDEA funding by \$2.2 billion over the current level to help school districts meet the costs of special education. We heard over and over when the IDEA reauthorization bill was debated on the House floor that the Republicans were authorizing the additional \$2.2 billion that would put IDEA on a glide path to full funding. Although this bill does provide a \$1.0 billion increase for special education, it provides less than half of the amount promised by 217 Republicans just seven short weeks ago - a \$1.2 billion shortfall.

**BROKEN PROMISE - Title I Funding:** The Majority also said in the budget resolution conference report that it would provide a \$1 billion or 8.6 percent increase over the current level for Title 1 grants to school districts. Yet, this bill falls \$334 million short - providing only the \$666 million increase requested by the President. The \$12.35 billion included in the bill for Title 1 is more than \$6 billion below the amount authorized in the NCLB Act. A promise made, a promise broken.

**BROKEN PROMISE - College Education:** This bill also fails our college students who paid, on average, a 10 percent tuition increase (at four-year public universities) in the school year just ended. On some campuses, the tuition increases were as much as 24 percent. Additional tuition increases are on the way as states slash higher education budgets to address record budget deficits, and colleges make up the difference in the form of even higher tuition bills. Yet, this bill freezes the maximum Pell Grant at \$4,050. As a result, the Pell Grant as a percentage of the cost of college attendance would fall to 38

percent in 2004 - a far cry from the 84 percent of college costs met when the Pell Grant Program was first established. The bill freezes all other forms of student financial assistance, too. Moreover, this deep freeze on the student aid budget comes on top of the Bush Administration's new regulation to reduce the amount of student aid for which students are eligible by cutting the deduction in the student aid eligibility formula for state and local taxes.

## FY2004 HHS APPROPRIATIONS: GOP SHORTCHANGING PRIORITIES

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*With the poverty rate increasing for the first time in four years, with 33 million poor people needing help with 16.3 percent of our children living in poverty, and with unemployment increasing to the highest levels in 9 years, one might expect a serious increase in funding for HHS and its social safety net programs. Instead, the Republicans are proposing a bill that in many cases slashes these very programs at the most crucial time. These cuts, of course, come just as the Republicans are proposing even more tax cuts for the wealthiest sliver of the population:*

**NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH:** Over the last five years, the NIH has received annual increases of roughly 15% as part of Congress's commitment to increase science and medical research. This year, the Bush Administration proposes to slam on the brakes, proposing an increase of just 2.5 percent - not even enough to keep up with inflation. The Republican bill adopts the Administration's proposal. Under this budget, NIH says it will be able to afford an increase of just two-tenths of one percent in the number of new and competing research grants (outside of the bio-defense area). That means there will be little room to fund new ideas and new avenues of inquiry, and only limited opportunity for young researchers to secure NIH support.

**HEALTH CARE SAFETY NET:** Currently, the number of people without health insurance is increasing as unemployment remains high and as budget shortfalls lead states to cut back on Medicaid eligibility and benefits. In response to this crisis, the Republican bill proposes funding levels that does very little for the most basic health care safety net programs. The bill provides no more than the Administration's budget for Community Health Centers - the smallest percentage increase since 1998. It provides no increase at all for the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant or the National Health Service Corps - despite the Administration having sought increases for both. It also provides no increase for childhood immunization - a program that has had trouble keeping up with the rising cost of vaccinating children and whose problems will be made worse by this bill.

**BIOTERRORISM PREPAREDNESS:** Under the Republican bill state and local health departments will receive \$94 million less in bio-terrorism preparedness grants than they received this year. The Department of HHS asked for \$100 million to get the nation better prepared to deal with an influenza pandemic; the bill provides only half that amount.

**NURSING SHORTAGE:** Last year, with much fanfare, Congress passed major new authorizing legislation, the Nurse Reinvestment Act, to help deal with that shortage. Yet the Republican bill provides no increase at all in funding for those programs this year. It actually contains \$7 million less than the President requested for one of the programs, which provides scholarships to nursing students who agree to work after graduation in areas with a serious shortage of nurses.

**UNEMPLOYMENT:** The Republican bill cuts the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) by \$150.8 million as proposed by President Bush. The Community Action Programs funded by CSBG help those people who most need help by helping them help themselves. If this cut remains in this bill, it will have an immediate impact on almost every single Congressional District, reducing services for the growing numbers of low-income, working poor and the long-term unemployed. In many areas, this cut will shut down

programs, which upgrade the skills and marketability of TANF recipients and other low-wage workers. And it will shut down desperately needed emergency food distribution efforts for homeless and other low-income families in 14 rural counties in Wisconsin, including three in my district.

**LOW INCOME HEATING ASSISTANCE:** The Republican bill does not even fully fund the President's request for LIHEAP. The President proposed a total of \$2.0 billion for LIHEAP, including \$1.7 billion for the state formula grant program and \$300.0 million for the emergency allocation. This would have provided roughly the same amount of funding that was available this year to help our most vulnerable citizens with their home energy needs. With the poverty rate increasing for the first time in four years, with 33 million poor people needing help with 16.3 percent of our children living in poverty, and with unemployment increasing to the highest levels in 9 years, the bill nonetheless cuts LIHEAP funding to \$1.8 **billion**, including \$1.7 billion for formula grants and \$100.0 million for emergencies - less than last year and less than the President's own request.

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## **BUSH/GOP: SLASHING FUNDS FOR MILITARY FAMILY HOUSING AND SCHOOLS**

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*On March 21<sup>st</sup>, the House voted to thank and support the men and women serving our country in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, giving its “unequivocal support and appreciation” to the members of the U.S. armed forces and their families. Unfortunately, as Congress begins to take up the annual appropriations bill, it appears that the GOP’s version of “support and appreciation” means slashing funds for military family housing and schools:*

**BUSH/GOP WOULD CUT \$1.5 BILLION OUT OF MILITARY HOUSING & WORKPLACES:** The Bush/GOP Military Construction Appropriations Bill proposes to cut \$1.5 billion out of military housing and facilities from last year’s level. Last year, the government spent \$10.7 billion on these priorities, while this year the 2004 Bush budget and GOP bill proposes just under \$9.2 billion. This cut affects military housing, barracks, child care centers, schools, hangars and office buildings.

**GOP BILL ACTUALLY CUTS \$180M OUT OF BUSH’S OWN REQUEST:** The GOP Milcon Bill slashes the President’s own request for the military hangars, offices, fitness centers and teaching facilities by \$180 million.

**CUTS COME ON TOP OF PROPOSAL TO CUT FUNDS FOR MILITARY SCHOOLCHILDREN:** President Bush’s fiscal year 2004 budget plan proposes to cut \$206 million out of the federal program that provides assistance to schools that serve military bases.

# HOMELAND SECURITY OR TAX CUTS FOR MILLIONAIRES?

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*U.S. Rep. David Obey (D-WI), senior Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, is preparing an amendment to the GOP Homeland Security Appropriations Bill that would add roughly \$1 billion for key security vulnerabilities that are ignored in the underlying bill. Obey's amendment would be paid for by slightly decreasing the amount that President Bush's tax cut lavishes on people making over \$1 million a year. Specifically, the 200,000 people with incomes over \$1 million would have their 2004 tax cut reduced from \$88,326 to \$83,326. A vote on Obey's amendment will clearly show whether the GOP supports tax cuts for the wealthy, or homeland security for the nation.*

**PORT SECURITY:** The amendment would add \$400 million to the GOP bill for port security grants. Currently, the bill includes just \$100 million for port security grants, despite the fact that the Coast Guard estimates that it needs approximately \$4 billion more for port security improvements than has been appropriated since September 11<sup>th</sup>. Currently, only \$463 million has been appropriated for port security grants since September 11<sup>th</sup>. The Coast Guard has reported it needs \$4.4 billion.

**BORDER SECURITY:** The amendment adds \$200 million for improving security at the northern border. Just a few weeks ago, a lone 6-year-old Canadian was able to walk unnoticed past U.S. Immigrations and Customs officials and end up 5 miles into U.S. territory. Clearly, the northern border is not as adequately protected as it needs to be.

**AVIATION SECURITY:** The amendment adds \$150 million for aviation security improvements that have been identified as problems in the past but have not been addressed because TSA has had to focus on screening. These improvements include airport perimeter security and ensuring that U.S. aircraft maintained overseas are secure.

**MARITIME SECURITY:** The amendment adds \$100 million for the Coast Guard to implement the Maritime Safety and Security Authorization Act passed last November. The Coast Guard has acknowledged that it faces substantial funding requirements to develop a vessel tracking system and assess foreign ports to make sure they are effectively secured for U.S. crafts.

**INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY:** The amendment adds \$50 million to the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection (IAIP), restoring the cut to the President's own budget request that the GOP bill proposes.



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### **HOYER ON HOUSE MEDICARE Rx BILL:**

*“Democrats Fight for Affordable, Guaranteed Benefit,  
While GOP Seeks to Undermine Medicare, Confuse Seniors”*

**WASHINGTON – House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) released the following statement today regarding the House Republican prescription drug bill that is expected to be approved by the two committees of jurisdiction by the end of this week (Ways and Means on Tuesday and Energy and Commerce today):**

“Democrats fought to create Medicare in 1965, and the program has been critical to seniors’ health ever since. And now we are fighting for an affordable, guaranteed prescription drug benefit under Medicare that *all* seniors can count on regardless of where they live.

“On the other hand, the Republican Party has always been opposed to Medicare, and the drug plan the House GOP is pushing is its latest attempt to dismantle the program altogether. The House GOP’s drug plan is completely confusing. It would force seniors to continue to pay a large portion of their drug bills, and leave them at the mercy of private insurers who may or may not choose to cover them. Seniors have been burned once before by private plans in the Medicare+Choice program. For example, eight Medicare HMOs covered over 100,000 Maryland seniors in 1997. By 2002, those insurers had all abandoned Maryland seniors.

“Under the House Republican bill there are *no* guarantees that a senior will be covered, much less pay less for the drugs they need to live than they do now. The \$35 premium that Republicans toss around as a part of their plan is nothing more than an estimate. Republicans would give insurance companies the power to determine how much seniors will pay. And the Republican bill would effectively privatize Medicare in 2010, turning over to insurance companies a program that tens of millions seniors depend on under the guise of ‘modernization.’

“This debate crystallizes the different priorities of Democrats and Republicans. The House GOP chose tax cuts - \$600 billion this year alone – over a comprehensive, affordable prescription drug benefit for seniors. America’s seniors were essentially an afterthought for them.

“Democrats want to get something done on this issue and we are going to fight to give seniors what they expect and deserve – a real prescription drug benefit under Medicare – and we will fight against the Republicans’ confusing and inadequate plan.”

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# **MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS**

Democrats have been fighting for years for a Medicare prescription drug program that is affordable; available to all seniors and Medicare beneficiaries with disabilities; offers meaningful, guaranteed benefits; and is available within the Medicare program. In sharp contrast, Republicans have only had plans to turn Medicare over to HMOs and the private insurance industry. Over the next several weeks, Democrats will do their best to address the numerous deficiencies in the GOP bills that are emerging on both the House and Senate sides and try to change those bills so that whatever Congress passes meets the four basic criteria mentioned above.

## **House GOP Bill**

On the afternoon of Thursday, June 12, Rep. Bill Thomas and Rep. Billy Tauzin unveiled the House GOP bill on prescription drugs. Under the bill, as under the Senate Finance bill, Medicare patients could obtain subsidies for their medicines in only two ways: by signing up for a stand-alone private insurance policy that covered prescription drugs, or by enrolling in a private health plan.

Although the bill does not force seniors to join private managed care plans in order to receive prescription drug coverage as President Bush initially proposed, the House GOP bill DOES force seniors to use private insurance companies for their prescription drug coverage – i.e. either they stay in traditional Medicare and purchase a drug-only insurance policy from a private insurance company or they leave traditional Medicare and get their prescription drug coverage from a PPO or HMO. The legislation also calls for traditional Medicare (coverage for hospital and physician care) to “compete” with private plans beginning in 2010.

## **Neither the Senate Finance bill nor the House GOP bill meet the four basic criteria that Democrats have laid out for an adequate prescription drug program.**

Key problems with the House GOP bill (which are also problems with the Senate Finance bill) include the following:

- ! The prescription drug benefit is not available through Medicare – but instead is only available through private insurance companies and HMOs. Insurance companies would design the new prescription drug plans, decide what to charge, and even decide which drugs seniors would get.
- ! The bill does not ensure that prescription drugs are truly affordable for seniors. The bill does not include any provisions to hold down the prices big drug companies charge. In addition, because of the arbitrary budget cap pushed by President Bush, the House GOP bill has a high deductible, does not guarantee an affordable premium, and is full of gaps and gimmicks.
- ! The bill does not ensure meaningful benefits. Under the House GOP bill, there is a large coverage gap – with many seniors being required to pay high premiums even when they don’t receive

benefits. Coverage would disappear just when seniors need it most. And benefits are not defined or guaranteed.

- ! The bill does not ensure that the prescription drug benefit is available to all beneficiaries. By relying on private insurance companies to offer coverage, the Republican approach does not guarantee the same benefits for seniors in rural communities, where millions of Americans have already been abandoned by HMOs in search of bigger profits elsewhere.

In addition, the House GOP bill is significantly worse than the Senate Finance bill. For example,

- ! The House GOP bill has “competitive bidding” provisions beginning in 2010 that would transform the existing Medicare program (Part A and Part B) from a defined benefit program into a voucher program (the Senate Finance bill does not have these provisions);
- ! The House GOP bill has a much larger coverage gap than the Senate Finance bill – with the House GOP bill’s coverage gap beginning at \$2,000 in drug costs, impacting 47% of seniors; and
- ! The House GOP bill has “means-testing” provisions that would provide that higher-income seniors would have to pay the same premiums but would get a less adequate benefit package than others (the Senate Finance bill does not have these provisions).

### **Democratic Amendments Being Offered During House Committee Mark-Ups**

The Ways and Means Committee completed its mark-up in one day – on Tuesday, June 17. The Energy and Commerce Committee is conducting a three-day mark-up, until late on Thursday, June 19. In both committee mark-ups, Democrats are offering important amendments in an effort to improve the GOP bill.

For example, in the Ways and Means Committee mark-up, Democrats offered the following four key amendments – which were defeated on mostly party-line votes:

- ! A Cardin amendment that would have provided all Medicare beneficiaries with the option of obtaining their prescription drug benefit through the Medicare program itself (defeated by a straight party-line vote of 15 to 23).
- ! A McDermott amendment that would have deleted from the bill its “competitive bidding” provisions, which beginning in 2010 would turn Medicare into a voucher program – rather than a defined benefit program (defeated by a straight party-line vote of 14 to 23).
- ! A Doggett amendment that would have encouraged the manufacturers of prescription drugs to offer prices in the United States similar to those they charge in Canada (defeated by a straight party-line vote of 13 to 22).

- ! A Stark substitute that would have replaced the GOP bill with a Democratic bill (similar to H.R. 1199) which would create a real prescription drug benefit under Medicare that would be affordable for seniors and disabled Americans and available to all no matter where they lived (defeated by a mostly party-line vote of 15 to 24).

Ultimately, the damaging GOP bill was reported out of committee by a mostly party-line vote of 25 to 15 (with only one Democrat voting for it).

Some of the Democratic amendments that have been offered in the Energy and Commerce Committee mark-up as of press time Thursday morning include:

- ! A Green (D-TX) amendment that would have closed the “coverage gap” of \$2,000 to \$4,900 that is included in the GOP bill (during which Medicare beneficiaries pay 100% of their drug costs) (defeated by a party-line tie-vote of 23 to 23);
- ! A Brown (D-OH) amendment that would have provided Medicare beneficiaries the same level of prescription drug coverage as federal employees and Members of Congress receive under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) (defeated by a party-line vote of 19 to 27);
- ! A Pallone amendment that would have authorized the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate lower prescription drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries (the GOP bill prohibits the Secretary from doing this) (defeated by a mostly party-line vote of 18 to 33); and
- ! A Dingell substitute that would have replaced the GOP bill with a Democratic bill (similar to H.R. 1199) which would create a real prescription drug benefit under Medicare that would be affordable for seniors and disabled Americans and available to all no matter where they lived (defeated by a party-line vote of 25 to 27).

Over the next several weeks, Democrats will continue to try to do their best to address the numerous deficiencies in the GOP bills that are emerging on both the House and Senate sides and try to change those bills so that whatever Congress passes meets the four criteria of affordability, availability, meaningful benefits, and provided through Medicare.

## **Dissenting Views on H.R. 2351, The “Health Savings Account Availability Act”**

We understand why this bill was enthusiastically endorsed by the Republican Members of this Committee. It advances two of their long-term objectives. It is another in a series of reckless tax cuts designed to deny needed funds for education, veterans, health, anti-poverty, and other programs. It also furthers their long-term objective of destroying employer-provided health care. We do not share those objectives and, therefore, strongly oppose this bill.

The Committee bill will cost \$71 billion over the next ten years. The ten-year estimate understates the long-term costs of the bill. In the later years of the budget window, the Committee bill will cost in excess of \$10 billion per year. Its cost will accelerate just at the time when the baby boom generation retires, denying resources to meet our commitments to the Social Security and Medicare systems.

The entire cost of the Committee bill will be funded by borrowing, increasing our national debt. The reckless tax cut agenda of this Republican Congress will create one of the largest spending increases in the history of this country. Two years ago, there was talk of actually paying off the entire national debt. As a result of the Republican fiscal policies, now the national debt, instead, will be increased dramatically every year. Interest on that debt will be an ever increasing Federal spending program. Future taxpayers will be faced with the obligation of funding those increased interest payments, but not one dollar of those interest payments will provide any benefit to the average individual.

The Republicans have long been hostile to employer-provided health care coverage. They seem intent on destroying both government and employer-provided health insurance coverage. In the past, the Chairman of the Committee has expressed his interest in dismantling the employment-linked health insurance system on the grounds that it has proven unsuccessful in extending coverage to all or even most Americans, and that it shields individuals far too much from the cost of care and coverage they use (Medicine and Health, May 13, 2002).

The Committee bill is an ingenious way of undercutting employer-provided health care coverage. It will provide tax-free savings accounts to individuals but only if the individuals have no health insurance or are covered by policies with relatively high deductibles. Individuals covered by traditional employer-provided health care plans will not be eligible for the new benefits. The Committee bill deliberately creates disincentives for traditional employer-provided health care.

If the Committee bill becomes law, employers currently providing health insurance coverage could use the tax benefits contained in the Committee bill as an excuse for reducing their health care costs. The tax benefits contained in the Committee bill will be available to individuals covered by employer-provided health care coverage only if the employer plan provides no coverage for at least the first \$1,000 of medical expenses. That deductible is greater than the deductible in most employers' plans. As a result, employers can increase the deductible required under their plan and argue that the employees will be benefitted through access to the Committee bill's tax benefits. The Committee bill provides incentives to reduce, not increase, coverage. The insurance cost savings will be enjoyed by the employer because there is no requirement that those savings be passed on to the employee.

For many American families, the tax benefits are worthless. The only thing they will receive from the Committee bill is reduced health care coverage. For example, a married couple with two children would receive no benefit from the Committee bill until their income exceeds \$39,000. Also, many American families with incomes above that level do not have \$4,000 annually in additional savings needed to benefit fully from the Committee bill. The bill is designed to benefit employers, not rank-and-file employees.

It would be our desire to work together on a bipartisan basis with the goal of expanding, not reducing, health care coverage. Unfortunately, our Republican colleagues do not share that goal. Therefore, we are left simply to oppose reckless attacks on current health care coverage.

# NEWS

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## CONGRESSMAN PETE STARK

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13TH DISTRICT CALIFORNIA

RANKING MEMBER WAYS AND MEANS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, June 19, 2003

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**WHILE ATTENTION IS FOCUSED ON MEDICARE,  
THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE ADVANCES PROPOSAL TO  
DESTROY EMPLOYER-SPONSORED HEALTH INSURANCE**

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, made the following statement about the so-called "Health Savings Account" proposal likely to be reported out of the Committee on Ways and Means today:

"This is a direct attack on employer-sponsored health insurance. This legislation allows employers to sell employees short. Employers can offer a tax-preferred savings account in exchange for increasing the deductible in their health insurance to \$1000 or more. There is nothing in the Republican bill that requires employers to put any money in the account and, even if there were, this deduction is meaningless to the average family with two children and an income of \$39,700 because they have virtually no tax liability. The notion that this is good for the uninsured is a cruel joke. If these families had extra money to save, they'd probably buy health insurance.

"When it comes right down to it, these accounts provide yet another tax shelter for the wealthy, allowing them to reap the benefits of yet another tax deduction to sock away thousands of dollars each year. Yet, for 170 million Americans, these accounts will undermine the very employer-sponsored health insurance system they rely on. And for the millions of uninsured, it's a hollow promise because most Americans don't have enough of a tax liability to be helped by such an account.

"Enacting HSAs as a solution to our health insurance woes is like eating an ice cream sundae to treat a stomach ache - they just make the problem worse."